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DE RUEHKH #0048/01 0151223
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2684
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000048

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2019

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL KPKO UN AU SU

SUBJECT: JEM ATTACKS SLM/MM AND BURNS MUHAJARIYA

REF: 08 KHARTOUM 1848

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Senior Presidential Assistant Minni Minnawi told CDA Fernandez that the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attacked his Sudan Liberation Movement forces stationed in Muhamjariyya and completely burned the village on January

¶15. Minnawi said that the fighting began in the early morning of January 15 and was still continuing as of 11:00 local time. According to the SLM Chairman, two of the three JEM commanders leading the attack recently defected from his movement to JEM. Minnawi alleged that these commanders are actually controlled by the Government of Sudan, that the GoS allowed JEM to carry out the offensive on SLM, and that reports of Sudanese Armed Forces bombing on JEM positions is part of a GoS "cover-up." Minnawi also claimed that the Chadian Government and SPLM are supporting JEM and "playing a dangerous game with Darfur and all of Sudan," as he described a conspiracy by strange bedfellows Chad, the NCP and SPLM to build up JEM as the preeminent Darfur rebel groups for a variety of reasons. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) A grim Minnawi opened the meeting with CDA Fernandez stating that a JEM force of 107 vehicles attacked the SLM stronghold of Muhamjariya early in the morning of January 15. (Note: Post has received confirmation of JEM-SLM fighting near Muhamjariya to be reported septel from other sources including UNAMID and SLA-Unity. Sudanese state-owned media outlets have also reported SAF bombing near Muhamjariya. End Note.) Later in the meeting, (after leaving the meeting for a third time for a phone call to "receive information from the field,") Minnawi returned visibly upset and reported that "JEM had completely burned Muhamjariya." Minnawi said that prior to the attack, JEM forces moved from Shangil Tobaya and Tabit to SLM/MM areas in South Darfur. He stated that two of his former SLM commanders, Chief of Staff Arko Suleiman Dahia and Deputy Commander in Chief Bakhit Karima (reftel) along with JEM Commander Abd Al Karim Shilou ("who is actually Chadian") led the attack for JEM. Minnawi noted that this attack is particularly significant as Muhamjariya is one of SLM/MM's three major strongholds in Darfur (the other two areas being Dar Es Salaam and Graida.) Minnawi said that since January 10, JEM's entire force had crossed over from Chad and (except for just JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim and Suleiman Sandal) is currently in Darfur. "Khalil Ibrahim wants to prove that he is the only force in Darfur and therefore he has to attack us," said Minnawi.

ALLEGED GOS INVOLVEMENT

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¶13. (C) Minnawi asserted that "his sources" in El Fasher

learned that JEM informed the GoS of their intention to attack SLM, and not the regime. Later Minnawi claimed that the GoS controls his former commanders Dahia and Karima and that the Sudanese Government has allowed JEM to move throughout Darfur and attack SLM. Minnawi confidante and SLM/MM member of parliament Ali Traio added that SAF bombing on JEM positions has been a ruse, not harmed JEM movements, and is only part of the GOS's attempt to cover up its involvement in the attack. Minnawi speculated that there is an informal Faustian understanding between the Cadian and Sudanese governments to allow Khalil Ibrahim to attack other rebel movements. "The Government of Sudan wants to erase SLM, and therefore they are supporting JEM in this attack," Minnawi stated.

¶4. (C) Minnawi said that although he has not yet had an opportunity to discuss this attack with the GoS, he previously did confront Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Hussein about the GOS's influence over his two defected commanders Karima and Dahia - something Hussein denied. He said that he plans on meeting Vice President Ali Osman Taha the afternoon of January 15, but that regardless of what Taha promises, he will return to Darfur (first El-Fasher and later possibly Muhajariya) on January 16. Minnawi and Traio both reported that the GoS has attempted to keep Minnawi in Khartoum by preventing his access to presidential planes and continuing to promise that it will finally deliver on implementation of the DPA and the 2008 El-Fasher agreement. Minnawi said that these NCP maneuvers will not keep him in Khartoum, and that he will find a way to travel, as "I am isolated here and I must see my people. If I don't fight I won't survive."

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ALLEGED SPLM INVOLVEMENT

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¶5. (C) Both Minnawi and Traio bitterly emphasized that the SPLM has not shared information regarding its intentions in Darfur, its contact with the Government of Chad, or its meetings with Khalil Ibrahim and JEM leadership. Minnawi said that he and his SLM/MM leaders have "been running after the SPLM, but they always keep their distance from us." Minnawi and Traio then went further to say that the SPLM wants to use JEM against the NCP and that it may allow JEM to do anything to become the strongest and most dominant force in Darfur. "The SPLM knows all the movements in Darfur, but it has focused only on JEM for the last six months, and they are playing a dangerous game by supporting JEM," stated Minnawi. Traio claimed that "trustworthy sources in N'djamena" have discovered an agreement between the Government of Chad (GOC,) the SPLM, and JEM. The GoC will focus on building JEM's military capacity, while the SPLM will work to make JEM a legitimate political force. "Something is happening in Darfur right now and the SPLM is playing a very dangerous game," emphasized Minnawi. Traio then claimed that the SPLM encouraged JEM's recent visit to Washington (especially through using its relationship with Norway) and that this is one more example of SPLM support for JEM. Traio alleged that SPLM leaders such as Pagan Amum and Yassir Arman do not tell GOSS President Salva Kiir of all their maneuvering in Darfur and that Kiir himself may not be aware of the exact nature of JEM's alliance with the SPLM. Traio then stated that rumors are that the USG has endorsed this alliance, saying "Everyone is saying that the Americans have abandoned SLM/MM and now give their support to JEM." This is being actively spread by JEM in Darfur. CDA Fernandez quickly replied that this is "absolutely false" and that senior U.S. officials told JEM leaders in Washington that JEM is not the only force in Darfur, that SLM and Minnawi have an important role to play in Darfur, and that the U.S. is concerned about JEM's past Islamic agenda. CDA Fernandez also noted that he suspected that they were unfairly blaming the SPLM (or at least Kiir) and informed Minnawi that he would be meeting First Vice President Salva Kiir later and also encouraged Minnawi to speak directly to SPLM leadership (Kiir meeting reported septel. CDA has

engineered a meeting between Minnawi and Kiir the evening of January 15).

COMMENT

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¶6. (C) JEM's attack on SLM/MM is very troubling and will undoubtedly turn Darfur into an even more volatile region. Although Minnawi did not provide sufficient evidence for his allegations and conspiracy theories of GOS and SPLM coordination with JEM, the JEM attack on Minnawi's forces raises many questions. Why is JEM now targeting Minnawi, rather than the GoS or stronger movements such as SLM/Unity? What influence does the GOS have over Minnawi's former commanders? Why have GoS officials and media widely reported/acknowledged SAF bombing on JEM positions, while it usually denies aerial bombing altogether? Certainly the attack changes the dynamic in Darfur, with JEM attempting to prove that it is the only major rebel force so that it can truly monopolize peace talks.. It may also represent an attempt to wipe out other Zagawa armed movements (in this case the "inferior" Tuer Clan of Minnawi, in the eyes of Khalil Ibrahim and his noble Kobe clan brethren) while providing an incentive for SLA/U (the third primarily Zagawa movement) to join forces with a triumphant JEM. Following on JEM's meetings with US officials in Washington, the JEM attacks earlier today have raised questions among the Sudanese regarding the US role in this latest development. Therefore a strong condemnation of these attacks is required urgently from Washington, as well as follow-up calls from senior US officials to Khalil Ibrahim to inform him that the US condemns the attacks and that this latest move seriously damages Khalil's already shaky credibility with the USG. While deeply disturbing, this attack is typical of today's deadly stalemate in Darfur as rebel and regime factions turn on each other in a feeding frenzy of political opportunism and greed.

FERNANDEZ